

*Preservation is Progress  
...may we be worthy stewards...*

# *Chautauqua Historical Society*

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Spring 2008

- The Newsletter is published three times a year: winter, spring, and fall.
- The Newsletter is a membership benefit at the Piasa Bluffs Assembly (PBA), and Patron levels.
- PBA members have a membership in the Chautauqua Network
- CHS members are encouraged to submit articles to the editor for inclusion in the Newsletter.


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*We have 18 PBA members, 67 Patron members, and will send this Newsletter to 154 households.*



*Villa Mexico, built circa 1905*



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### *The President's message*

Last winter Cynthia and Bob Hormell gave us a box of family memorabilia related to Chautauqua, originally the property of Kaye and Gordon Higgins, Cynthia's parents. With this gift, we were able to fill in some missing years of our program book collection. We added also some copies of the *Chautauqua Echoes*, the 1950s version of our *Channels*.

Our Tuesday morning archival group worked last summer on old programs and photographs from Chautauqua's stage activities. We didn't have information about how the Chautauqua Players were formed and who was responsible for bringing the group together. The Hormell/Higgins box provided information about the early days of the *Players*. A scrapbook with play programs, photographs, the By Laws,

Minutes, and letters shows the group was formed in 1956. Some of the early "Players" were the Higgins, Bernice and Byron Jackson, Bill and Bob's parents, Colberts, and Phil Polster. Many contemporary Chautauquans, when "younger," worked as stage hands, including Bill and Bob Jackson. The box had a 1957 LC IA *Treasurer's Report*. Imagine the summer of 1957: the LCIA ran the Springs Hotel, brought in \$1,586.50, and paid out salaries of \$981.50. The following year they enclosed the pavilion with screening.

Our neighbors in Fern Glen have played an important part in our history. Tim Tomlinson interviewed Rev. Daniel Zimmerman for the *Villa Mexico* article that appears in this issue. He remembered his father working on the renovation of the *Villa Mexico* in the 1940s. Dan gave us a large collection of Newsletters published by the Historic Elsie Foundation—great reading about our area. The Newsletters, some dating back to the 1970s, will be archived, assembled in a notebook, and placed in our community library.

We will continue our archival work this Season on Tuesday mornings in the Ad building. Our "collections" continue to grow, and our space continues to diminish. We have plans to address this problem, and will keep everyone informed. For now, thanks to the people who have added to our historical collection, and thanks to our members for their continued support of all the work of the Historical Society—the Newsletter, our archival project, and our PBA programming each season.

*Rose Tomlinson*

### **PRESERVATION IS PROGRESS**

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*The mission and purpose of the Chautauqua Historical Society is the preservation and enhancement of the historic traditions and culture of New Piasa Chautauqua, Chautauqua, Illinois, the encouragement of historical research on the Chautauqua community and nearby historic districts, the publication of historical brochures, pamphlets, and other written material on New Piasa Chautauqua, remaining permanent assemblies and chautauquas in other parts of the United States and the national Chautauqua movement, and the establishment of an educational program to inform the Chautauqua community and the general public of the historical and educational value of New Piasa Chautauqua.*

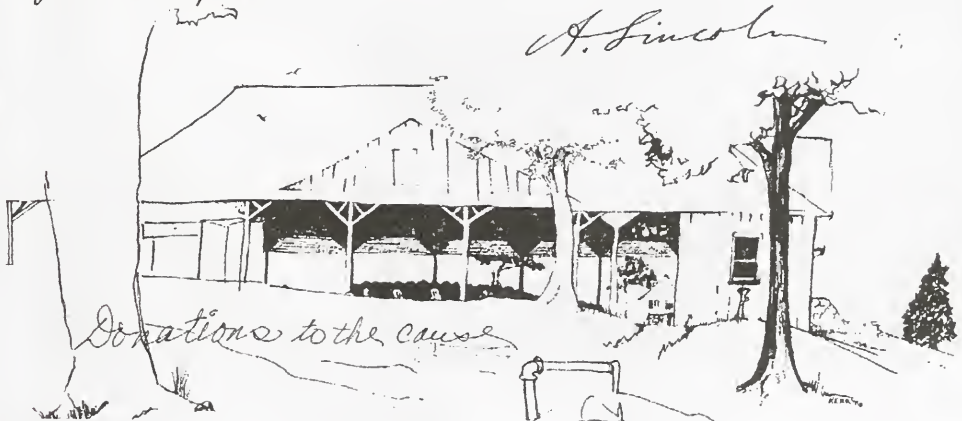




This thirty-two year old document was conserved last summer by volunteers in our Archives Recovery and Conservation project. The document is now safe in a special archival sleeve in a notebook whose contents will be catalogued this summer. What a shame it would have been to have lost this wonderful advertisement flyer for an event in our community's 91st Season, 1976. That year was, of course, the two hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

On the 21st. of August, 1976, the Chautauqua Players will present Stephen Vincent Benet's "John Brown's Body" at 8:15 p.m. in the Chautauqua Auditorium. Principle roles in this moving drama will be played by Dr. Joseph H. Saffler, Alice C. Kelley and John D. Lee. Sam Schmidt is the Director. Please plan to attend.

A. Lincoln







Last summer Becky and I, along with Dave and Chris Hagin, spent a week at the original Chautauqua, in Chautauqua County New York. The trip to New York was like any other, but once you crossed into Chautauqua County, you begin your immersion into all things Chau-



taqua. Chautauqua Post Office, Chautauqua Bank, Chautauqua Pizza, Chautauqua Sewer District, I think you get the idea. Once we realized we were in *Chautauqua* County, visiting a place named *Chautauqua*, located on *Chautauqua* Lake, the thrill of seeing the name *Chautauqua* shortly became second nature. That was only the beginning.

I had high expectations of New York, a busy family vacation, to include fishing, golf, little bit of sightseeing, eating too much, and broken promises of going for that long walk to work off last night's dinner. We had arrived too early to check into our cottage, so the property manager suggested we look for a place to eat lunch in Mayville, just past the entrance to the grounds. My first hint that this Chautauqua was going to be different than our Chautauqua was when we passed by the front gates to the grounds. "Gates to the grounds" does not do this justice. "Gates to the Compound" is more deserving. The Visitor's Center is roughly three times bigger than Grafton's. Our mouths just hung open in silence as we passed. In Mayville we found a nice restaurant, The Captains Table, overlooking Lake Chautauqua. The food was good food, and they even let us take an iced tea glass with their logo printed on it, the first of many souvenirs.

We had received our "Visitor's Package" about a month earlier: On-Grounds Parking Pass, Bicycle Registration Sticker, Pre-Printed and Dated Visitor Name Tags, (I'll explain these later), and tons of maps and various information packets. Driving onto the grounds there is no little gatehouse and call box. Instead, there is a large "grandiose" entrance manned by none other than a Chautauqua Policeman. I'm not making this up; they actually have a sworn Chautauqua Police Department, as well as their own EMS service, on the grounds.

One of the first things we noticed was the large number of people walking around. We eventually realized why. We had an on-ground parking pass because the cottage we rented had a driveway. If you stay in a Condo or apartments without a parking spot, you have to pay to park on the Chautauqua parking lot across the street from the grounds. This would be similar to parking near the harbor or workshop, and paying \$10 per day. As we followed our map of the grounds, we passed by some streets that were marked "no vehicle traffic," or "no vehicle or bicycle traffic." We quickly realized that almost everyone walks or bikes around. Vehicles are only used to come and go from the grounds. You can't drive to an event or meeting because there are no parking spots available anywhere, no golf carts either. If you need a ride you simply make it to the end of your street and a free shuttle picks you up, and drops you off anywhere along several routes.

We arrived at the cottage, threw down our gear, and grabbed our bikes, making sure that our bicycle permits were clearly visible, and that we had our name tags on person. This Chautauqua is not flat like ours; this one is



built on a lakeside, with steep hills. We quickly found the high points and would coast as far as we could. Becky and I were like a couple of little kids, pedaling around, telling the other to look at this or look at that, trying to gobble in all the sights in one day. We found one cottage bigger than another, but didn't find any with catchy names like *Ding-a-long*, for example. These cottages had only the year they were built and a family name—original family names as we found out later.





We discovered Bestor Plaza, the center of town, a no vehicle, and no bicycle area. The Plaza had small shops, clothes, shoes, jewelry and antiques etc., and the Chautauqua bookstore, library, post office, and several restaurants, all on the grounds! Almost everyone walking around had nametags attached to lanyards. We thought this was funny until we later found out how this



place worked and how important the nametags were. After riding back to the cottage, we piled into the car to go to dinner and the grocery store. Returning to the grounds, we had to show our parking pass and our nametags at the front gate. Later that night we met up with the Tim and Rose Tomlinson, who had arrived a few days prior. Their being experienced Chautauquans, we had quite a few questions for them, the first being "what is with all of the nametags?" Let me back up a few months. Preparing for our trip, I had gone online and checked the activities for the week we were going to be at Chautauqua. I found orchestra concerts, ballets, operas, and plays, all with tickets available for purchase thru the website. Being a good husband, I thought I would win points by getting some advanced tickets to the visiting North Carolina University Dance School showcase, at a whopping \$39 each. So I bought those tickets, figuring we would see what else interested us after we were on site. Now, as we started talking with Tim and Rose, and told them about our plans for the dance show and the tickets we bought, Tim informed us that our nametags and the dates of our stay were our tickets to all of the shows, in-

cluding the University Dance School showcase. It was that simple, other than one or two programs, your nametag was your ticket to everything on the grounds. Since we had purchased the weekly passes and were staying on the grounds we could go everywhere for free. This information turned out to be the defining moment of the trip.

Each morning *The Chautauquan*, the local paper, was delivered to every cottage, condo, and apartment. Similar in purpose to our *Channels*, this was a suburban journal-size newspaper, dedicated solely to the goings on that day in Chautauqua. My father-in-law, Dave Hagin, and I had tee times every morning at one of the two on-ground golf courses. After dropping off our clubs at the clubhouse on day one, we simply woke up each morning, ate a quick breakfast, hopped onto our bikes and pedaled for about 5 minutes to the clubhouse, where the attendants had our clubs cleaned and on the cart waiting for us to play. After the round of golf, we parked the cart, left our clubs and usually the scorecard there, and pedaled home. After lunch, Chris and Becky would come home and tell us what they discovered that morning. We would pour over *The Chautauquan* and plan our course of action for the rest of the day and evening. Before we knew it, our days and nights were filled with lectures, ballets, and concerts--from symphonies, Emmy Lou Harris and jazz, to opera. If you felt like it you could even go to a movie in the small theatre on the grounds.



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In looking back on the trip, I asked my family what experiences stood out in their memories. Dave said he loved riding his bike to the golf course and the dinner dance cruise we all went on across the lake, and Chris couldn't point to one thing, a lecture from Journalist Nancy Gibbs about the Presidents she interviewed, to sitting on the front porch with the little girls from next door and teaching them to paint. For Becky and me, there was no doubt. It was "The Day we never came home." We started that day with breakfast at the farmers market, then a lecture in the Hall of Philosophy, followed by a book signing. We had a quick lunch in Bestor's Plaza, and then watched the Boys and Girls Club water Olympics (a whole different article). We had dinner at the Tally Ho Hotel, which has an amazing buffet every night, prepared by a wonderful German couple. Then we went to the dance show, along with a couple of thousand of our closest friends. As soon as that was over, we raced across the grounds to the 11 pm start of the opera student's review of Broadway Musical Famous Love Songs. We left the cottage around 8 am and made it to bed close to 1 am the next morning. What was best? For all of us, it was experiencing the New York Chautauqua with family, which of course makes any adventure better. That said, nothing can compare to our Chautauqua. New York does come real close.

**Matt Pyatt**



**The 2008 Season** is already full of surprises, starting three weeks earlier than ever before. In the "olden days" when Dr. F. W. Grundmann was building *Villa Mexico* and when folks arrived at Chautauqua by train and river steamer, the Season" lasted four to six weeks, chock full of daily lectures, musical performances, classes of many kinds, and opportunities for the William Jennings Bryans of the time. Our Chautauqua was not unlike the Mother Chautauqua described by Matt Pyatt in his article in this Newsletter.

Our annual programs still maintain a connection with those earlier times. The Program Committee, led by Barb Mennell, has put together another interesting group of events and activities. The Historical Society, cooperating with the Program Committee, will sponsor four events of the type that were standard fare 100 years ago. On June 15, Tim Tomlinson will talk on "Art in the Garden," describing sculpture in outdoor spaces, with photographs from the new exhibition at the Missouri Botanical Garden. On July 13, John Williams, Principia College professor and former president of the Historic Elsie Foundation, will give the Sixth Annual Platform Lecture. John will speak on James Semple, Elsie's founding father and contemporary of Abraham Lincoln. On July 20, Matt Pyatt will reprise and extend his article on the Mother Chautauqua for this edition of the Newsletter with a presentation on the Chautauqua Institution, with lots of pictures showing what a summer vacation in New York is like. Finally, on July 27, the *Benjamin St. James Fry Circle* of the

Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (our small, but persevering local Circle, will sponsor a book review, featuring novelist Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*. Check the Program Book (thanks to Mary Roberts) and weekly editions of the Channels (thanks to Donna Minard) for more specific information about these programs.

Tim and Rose Tomlinson will attend this year's Chautauqua Network gathering, to be held at the Monteagle Sunday School Assembly, Monteagle, Tennessee, July 17-20.

### ***Chautauqua Veterans Memorial Flag Schedule***

May 24	Raise the Flag Paul Hattery
May 26	Memorial Day
June 15	William Grundmann
July 4	William Clarkson
July 27	Frank Nickols
August 10	Jack Hormell
September 1	Retreat the Flag





# SUMMER COTTAGE FOR DR. F.W. GRUNDMANN J.L. WEES - ARCHT

SCALE 1/4"=1'-0"

Dr. F. W. Grundmann, a St. Louis homeopathic physician, was born in Westphalia, Germany in 1858. Grundmann was educated first in Germany, and may have come to America alone, as a young man. He attended the night public schools of St. Louis. He went to Central Wesleyan College from 1883 to 1886. He graduated from the Homeopathic Medical College of Missouri in 1888. Grundmann practiced general medicine and specialized in surgery. He married Sophie Wilde in 1890, and he and Sophie and their children rented at Piasa Chautauqua in 1903 and 1904. **Bill Grundmann** tells us his grandfather "decided to build a cottage on an unplatted steep hillside...far from the main activity area. After the close of the World's Fair, Granddad had drawn for him. The hillside site was prepared by blasting and the building materials started the journey from St. Louis by freight train and Eagle Packet Company freight boat. The material probably arrived in 1905, and the cottage completed in that year."



Dr. and Mrs. Grundmann, daughters Cornelia and Elsa, and son William spent summers at Chautauqua until Dr. Grundmann's death in 1927.

Dr. F. W. Grundmann was among the men and women who rescued our Chautauqua by purchasing capital stock in the 1909 Reorganization that created *New Piasa Chautauqua*. Poor weather and an economic turndown across the country

in 1907 and 1908 had put the Piasa Chautauqua experiment in financial jeopardy. Grundmann purchased two shares from a total of 150 shares at \$100 per share to pay off financial obligations. The community would open again in 1909, with a new name, a new charter, and a new system of governance and administration, far removed from the religious, church-affiliated beginnings of 1885.



Cornelia Grundmann (left) and her sister Elsa. Both girls were older than William, who was Bill and Gordon's father

F. W. Grundmann was an important member of the St. Louis medical community, active in his practice and as a teaching physician. He was chief of staff and chief surgeon to Good Samaritan Hospital, a professor of bacteriology, pathology and surgical pathology at the Homeopathic Medical College of Missouri, his alma mater, and chaired a committee for a new building at Good Samaritan Hospital. Grundmann

was active in several medical societies. He was a Mason and belonged to one of the Moolah Temples in St. Louis.

William Grundmann followed his father into medicine. He married June Everhart in 1932, the year he graduated from the University of Arkansas Medical School and started his practice in St. Louis. The 1930's were difficult years for many Americans, including folks like the Grundmanns, and there wasn't much time for Chautauqua. Bill says, "Poor economic conditions continued through the 1930's and our family did not get back much until 1940. During that period, many teens referred to the cottage as haunted by a Mexican lady ghost."

The *Villa Mexico* began to take on a new look in the early 1940's. Daniel Zimmerman, a long-time good friend of the Chautauqua community from Fern Glen Valley, remembers that his father, Ed, was both a friend of William Grundmann and a very capable local handyman. Dan's grandfather was among the local help who carried the boards and windows sent from St. Louis from the river dock to the building site. Dan's father was the local handyman now, adding new bathrooms, extending porches, and providing an inside stairway to the second floor. In F. W.'s time, that area had been rented. Access was through a second floor doorway at the backside of the cottage, and one had to come up the hill on the riverside.





**Gordon Grundmann** remembers driving through Alton and Godfrey, and entering Chautauqua through the back gate. "When we reached the house we walked across a wooden bridge over the ravine and entered the house by walking up a very wide set of wooden stairs to the front porch.....The first thing I usually did.....was to run to the river porch to see the river. In time the river became part of my consciousness. The river porch was sort of a window to the world."



Bill and Gordon, with their parents, June and William Grundmann.

Changes took place as the new Grundmann family took over. Bill describes how fill material was removed: "Enter Bill, Gordon, and friends, at least before the digging, they dug and sent buckets of material on a pulley rope-tram tied to two trees to the bottom of the hill. The road bridge, new basement entrance

and front steps on the side were made of Dad's favorite material—concrete."

Gordon says the location of *Villa Mexico* provided views of the river, ball field and pool, and also of fellow Chautauquans: "The hiking trail to the top of the bluff started at the bottom of the hill and progressed up the bluff right beside our house. If we were on the porch, we would talk to the hikers as they huffed and puffed their way up the bluff. Farther up the bluff the trail passed within a few feet of the edge of the bluff. We were always concerned about hikers with little kids who passed so close to the edge."

Bill remembers the pool: "Looking back, the pool without filters meant weekly cleaning with brooms and refilling with 55 to 60 degree water—very cold on Tuesday."

Both Grundmanns remember eating meals on the back porch, and the kitchen with its coal/oil stove. Gordon tells us "The kitchen in the house was very primitive compared to today's standards. The sideboard and the back of the sink in the kitchen were covered with a sheet metal material like tin. Nothing fancy. We also had a coal oil cooking stove. The icebox was a true "icebox." When we needed ice, we put a card

on the porch railing facing the lower road showing the vendor how much ice we needed. The men who carried the ice up the hill were very unhappy when the sign called for 100 pounds of ice. Carrying 100 pounds of ice up the hill was a tough job. Sometimes when we pulled the water pan out from under the icebox, there would be a large wolf spider on the water. That proved to be interesting to my mother."



June Grundmann (R) supervises two friends, all the ladies in "summer attire" for cooking without air conditioning



Gordon also recalls a three-week vacation at *Villa Mexico* when daughter Amy was an infant, and was troubled by colic. She stopped crying those three weeks, enjoying the sounds of the pool and the river and taking afternoon naps on the porch glider. Chautauqua worked!

Our records show *Villa Mexico* to be one of two cottages in the community held continuously by the same family and only that family. The second is *Takitezy*, held by the Beckwith family who purchased Piasa Bluffs Assembly stock in 1902.

*Villa Mexico* (Infrared), by Jerry Benner, Limited Edition, ©2005, used with permission.

